PROTOCOL

Government Session No. 12/Tevet 5724
15 Tevet 5724
December 1, 1963

Ministers Present:
L. Eshkol (Chairman), A. Eben, Y. Allon (end of item 129), Z. Aran, Y. Bar-Yehuda, M. Dayan, Z. Varhafte, D. Yosef, G. Meir, P. Sapir, B.S. Shitrit, H.M. Shapira, A. Sasson

Ministers Absent:
Y. Almogi, Y. Bourg (abroad)

Attendees:
Y. Uzai – Secretary of the Government
D. Horowitz – Governor of Bank of Israel (item 129)
Y. Arnon – Director-General, Treasury Ministry (item 129)
A. Ariely – Supervisor of State Revenue (item 129)
Z. Zandberg – Economic Advisor to the Minister of Treasury
S. Soricker – Supervisor of Budgets (item 129)

Agenda:
119. Death of Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, may he rest in peace
120. Questions
121. Surveys / Reviews
122. Appointment of a Member to the Government
123. Status of agricultural committees operating near local councils
124. Discussion in the Knesset on bill to amend the statute of the community
125. Approval of the treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons testing
126. Amendment to the constitution of Yad Vashem
127. Approval of Income Tax Bills (depreciation supplement on business assets)
128. Strike declared by the Civil Service Workers Union
129. Budget proposal for fiscal year 1964/65

REVIEWS

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

Perhaps I should say only a few words about Kennedy's death and what happened after it. Anyone who was in America recently felt that for some time he had many opponents, even within his own party, of course the entire South. There was also some disappointment in certain circles. For instance, a television journalist from ABC interviewed me only days before the assassination. At the end of the interview, she asked me: "What do

you think about Kennedy?" I told her I was not American, and I didn't want to draw her into a big debate. I said a few words to her—it was "off the record."

She said: "I am very disappointed. I was for him. He has done nothing. He mobilizes the people." That was strange. Some people woke up and said: "He is not like Roosevelt, who came to the people, brought the people into issues. There was a relationship between Roosevelt and the people. Not so Kennedy; he sits remotely."

After this happened, there was a feeling that this moment changed the world of the Americans, not just the American world, but the entire world. Besides, there was truly a feeling of some private, personal loss for each one. It was not artificial.

In Washington, I have never seen anything like it. They say there was complete silence. Not a sound was heard. It was a cold morning. People stood for hours. It was truly grief and personal mourning.

Two million people were in the streets.

One cannot escape from the human side of the matter. His wife—an intelligent woman—and her conduct helped greatly to create such an attitude. She appeared as an extraordinary personality—some spiritual powers that are difficult to explain. If there had not been some crisis, one could not understand how a person could endure like that. It is not simply that she sat without hysteria all the time before the public.

In the American press, it was written that she gave America something that was never had before—a sense of royalty in her conduct. This is nobility and great powers indeed.

When I returned a year ago after a conversation with Kennedy—it was almost exactly a year ago—I said then that I believed in him, and I am still not prepared to change my opinion. Even had not this great disaster occurred, I would have said the same thing: that I believed in him, that he was a friend. It doesn't matter that people say he needs the Jewish votes. Let us say he needs the Jewish votes. But I did not doubt his friendship, and I do not doubt it despite that.

There will be debates, there will be misunderstandings. We will not receive everything we want. I had no doubt, but mainly I did not despair that this was a very serious and important address. The Jewish people will certainly benefit.

With his death, it is also interesting how Jews thought about it—breathing a sigh of relief when it became known that it was not a Jew who was the assassin. Why should one think it was specifically a Jew who would assassinate Kennedy? I don't know, but they sighed with relief when it was not a Jew.

Minister of Interior and Minister of Health M.H. Shapira:

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

Everyone in the Jewish world thought so.

After that, when this character Jack Ruby entered, it was very difficult. I was horrified and am still not calm. In my opinion, there are "dark corners" in this entire matter, and it is doubtful whether they will ever be cleared up. Today there is already information that Oswald was not of sound mind, was not balanced—he

was mentally ill. The fact that something about the Dallas police is strange—a policeman entered the building to check if everything was in order. A boy passes with such a bundle, and he asks him, "What is that?" The boy answers, "A curtain rod." The policeman, instead of opening the bundle and verifying if it really was a curtain rod, didn't do that. Instead, he continued. When someone tells him, "He works for us," he is satisfied with that. What does it matter if he works for them or doesn't work for them? He has a bundle—show what's in the bundle. They didn't check the bundle.

Moreover, Oswald was registered as a Castro man, as a Communist. He tried to be in Russia, as if they knew he was in Dallas. Very strange things indeed. But even stranger is the affair of Jack Ruby. Since there is television, they saw him on television. Oswald saw him a second before he approached him. He recoiled. It is clear that Oswald knew him. How did Ruby get in there? How did a person get into the police building? How did he park his car in the police parking lot? Immediately after that, a policeman says: "If I had seen him, I would have thrown him out. We know him. He has a record with the police." If one policeman knew him, surely other policemen knew him. How did he get in?

And now America's authorities, with this investigation—it is not just an investigation into how the thing happened, that Kennedy was assassinated, but who is this Ruby, for what purpose, and why did he kill Oswald? An important person in the government told me that the question of whether Ruby did it of his own will or did it on commission to silence Oswald is a question for us—a question of war and peace.

Minister of Education and Culture Z. Aran:

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

To whom?

If he is Castro's agent, if there is an underground of Castro that goes as far as the assassination of the President, and it is organized in such a way that they silence the assassin—and if in all of this there is a Jew—they receive the killing of Oswald with severity. Not less serious than the assassination of Kennedy. If it is part of a plan, if there is an underground—

I am not a detective, and I don't even like to read detective fiction. But I ask myself. I think Ruby is an agent of someone. I say: either of some political underground or of the Dallas police. I am talking now about Ruby.

Minister of Justice D. Yosef:

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

The second assumption is more acceptable.

One should remember that Kennedy was assassinated. When he entered a place like that, in no way and in no manner could he leave. Did he enter of his own volition? In any case, in the police building there are hundreds of policemen and detectives. It is impossible to leave there.

Minister of Justice D. Yosef:

Did it happen inside the building?

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

Inside the building, in a corridor that television people and journalists entered. Each one was checked. Only they entered. There is a narrow passage between the cameras. A door opened and Oswald came out with two policemen, handcuffed and shackled to them. You can see in the crowd stands a man with a gun and points toward him. There is a picture where Ruby is already shooting. A policeman stands next to him and is watching. It was fantastic. If he were of sound mind, he would have known that he couldn't leave there. But he went to "sanctify the name," to avenge Kennedy's death.

Now they say that in Texas or in Dallas, the assassination of the President is not a federal crime.

Deputy Prime Minister A. Eben:

If they kill him in Washington, it is a federal crime.

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

Only now are they correcting the law. Rusk told me: If they killed me, this is a federal crime. This is one of the strange things—a defect in the Constitution. The investigation is conducted only in Dallas. That is why even the FBI did not enter the picture.

They say: Either in Dallas or in Texas there is such a law—if one can prove that a person was not of sound mind at the moment he committed the crime, and an hour before that or an hour after that he was of sound mind, he can be judged as someone who was not of sound mind.

In the first days there was a statement by the Dallas police chief. When they interrogated Ruby immediately after the assassination, he was completely unbalanced, was not entirely balanced. After an hour he quieted down, was normal, spoke reasonably. A strange and dark thing, such that Johnson appointed a committee with Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren at its head. This is not simple. They decided to turn the world around and investigate the matter to the end. If they have the ability to investigate—I don't know.

In the midst of all the mourning, it is clear that we faced the question: What will happen? Will something change or not? As I said earlier, Johnson is not a blank page. It is not the case that nothing is known about him and that he has had no contact with us. That he has not been in contact with our matters. Eben was in contact with him, and also after that, in 1956, he came out against sanctions. One could say that he was in opposition. This was in the days of Eisenhower. But in any case, he has such a record. This contact with him never ended. I had a completely unexpected case last year when the Peace Corps conference was in Puerto Rico. I went there. Johnson opened the conference. Since this was a very informal matter, he invited me to eat at his table. The conference lasted a day and a half. I met him several times in conversations on the matter. There was a complicated decision. I helped a bit to formulate it. He is altogether a very easy man to meet with. Ties were formed.

There is one great thing—the nightmare of the democratic regime. Along with this, there are very disturbing things about this matter.

Minister of Interior and Minister of Health M.H. Shapira:

Right away appoint a new president.

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

He automatically, by law, if the President cannot for some reason fulfill his function, he immediately automatically is President. But he cannot sign anything as long as he has not been sworn in. Jackie Kennedy demanded that she be permitted to stand next to him when he was sworn in, still with his suit covered with blood.

This happened on Friday. Saturday, early morning, at 4 or 4:40, they brought Kennedy's coffin and placed it in the White House. At 6 or 7, through another door of the White House, they already began to take out Kennedy's personal things. Everyone sees it on television.

Johnson had no choice. It is also the end of the year. There were all sorts of laws. Also the budget. A budget problem like sometimes happens with us. Until they finally decide on the budget—budget for a month or two—they must immediately sign. Right away he went to work. This is a big thing, but there is a side of cruelty in it.

Now I want to say, I am very pleased. It seems to me that also the President, I am speaking about our President, and about American Jews one cannot speak. It was an important and great thing that the President came to Kennedy's funeral. I doubted in the first hours. A day passed and no announcement was made about the coming of heads of state to the funeral. Only de Gaulle and Prince Philip. If only three or four heads of state came, according to the list—each is owed a certain place with the President, before the heads of government. Could it be that he would be among the few? He would be before the heads of government. But many came. The entire world was there.

Minister of Transportation Y. Bar-Yehuda:

Even Arabs?

Foreign Affairs Minister G. Meir:

Arabs—no, not more than the Foreign Minister. There was Fauzi from Egypt. Iraq was represented by their ambassador. Well, when Eleanor Roosevelt died and there was a funeral at the U.N.—the Arabs did not participate. This time yes, they spoke.

[Note: This translation continues but is truncated here. The full cabinet discussion includes extensive remarks by Foreign Minister Golda Meir on U.S.-Israel relations, the transition from Kennedy to Johnson, and various diplomatic matters, with over 13,000 characters of Hebrew dialogue.]